



**Anthony DeCarlo, VMD
CEO, Red Bank Veterinary Hospital
Statement
Food Safety Hearing
Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee
House Energy and Commerce Committee
April 24th, 2007**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, and thank you to Congressman Pallone (whose statement I've read) for an informative and heartfelt plea for better controls and reporting mechanisms when it comes to the health and safety of our pets. I consider it an honor to appear and give testimony before this esteemed Subcommittee.

On April 5, Congressman Pallone visited Red Bank Veterinary Hospital to gather facts about how our hospital was dealing with suspected cases of contamination. Now he is working in his own legislation in the health care subcommittee he chairs on ways to improve federal regulatory oversight, including the establishment of a central registry to expedite the government's response to any future such situations.

I don't feel that I can speak with authority on improving regulatory oversight because I'm not clear that a lack of oversight is indeed the reason for this problem to have existed and grown. What we need as veterinarians is to have a better mechanism in place to track unusual occurrences, be able to get information to an appropriate centralized reporting agency and then back out to the veterinary community in a timely manner.



Congressman Pallone has done an excellent job of distilling a large body of information into an accurate and concise statement; as a result of this consolidation of information, I will be speaking this morning about an improved means of gathering and disseminating information from the veterinary perspective.

There are many sites where veterinarians gathered information regarding this recall, from the American Veterinary Medical Association, to the State Veterinary Medical Associations, to the Pet Food Manufacturers, to the media and more. While each of these organizations did a fine job of relating their real-time information to their websites, the veterinary community does not have readily available resources to add to and retrieve this information in a focused and timely manner.

Many veterinary practices have only enough staff to meet the existing needs of that practice and its normal volume of cases. What happened in a situation such as this one, is that many veterinarians were alerted by the breaking story on television long before they were alerted via email or phone call from their clients, colleagues or vendors.

Having a central reporting agency and a way for that agency to quickly disseminate the information would be a key factor in heading off a similar problem in the future. A possible solution to this problem would be a program utilizing a network of sentinel veterinary hospitals across the country as a way to quickly get information to a central agency and to get feedback in a likewise timely manner.



It would be the agency's responsibility to educate the sentinel hospitals on how to interact with the give and take of information. It would be the responsibility of the sentinel hospital to educate their staff as to how to work internally on organizing and reporting to the agency.

The sentinel hospitals would be reporting on a regular basis to the appropriate agency, thereby establishing a surveillance baseline to predict and forecast potential crisis.

This will allow the agency to report back to the sentinel hospital the proper diagnostics to engage and how to deal with the results.

This does not relieve the agency of the responsibility of reporting to all veterinarians when a crisis occurs.

If we can continue to build on the existing infrastructure and improve the ebb and flow of information to a central reporting agency, we as veterinarians will have better ability to work with the government, at all levels, to aid in the surveillance and reporting of potential animal health related issues.